

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S mystery magazine

CONTENTS

NOVELETTE

- THE CRIME MACHINE *by Jack Ritchie* 106

SHORT STORIES

- THE CASE OF THE SECRET SORROW *by Henry Slesar* 2
- YOU DRIVE, DEAR *by Fred S. Tobey* 9
- ALL THE NEEDLESS KILLING *by Bryce Walton* 12
- THE FULL TREATMENT *by Rog Phillips* 26
- A WITCH FOR THE BURNING *by C. B. Gilford* 40
- BEHIND THE LOCKED DOOR *by O. H. Leslie* 55
- THE RICH GET RICHER . . . *by Douglas Farr* 68
- MURDERER #2 *by Jean Potts* 78
- NO KILLER HAS WINGS *by Arthur Porges* 92

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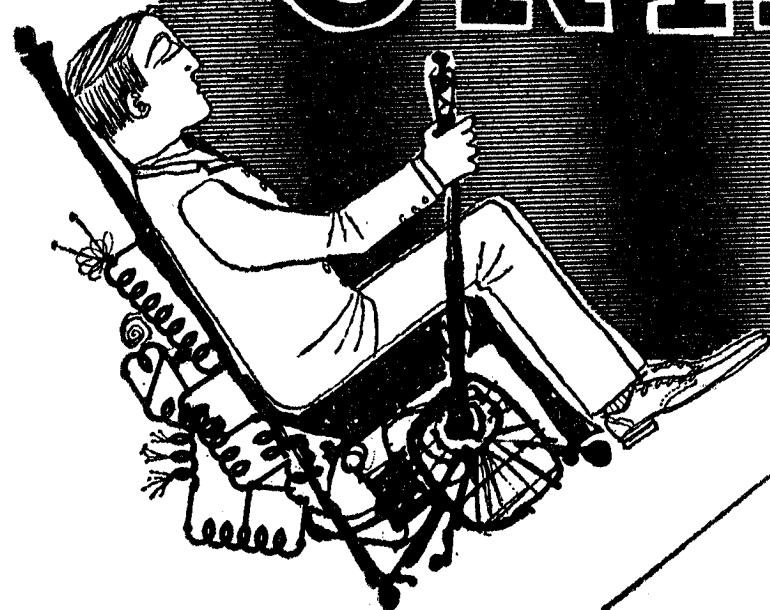
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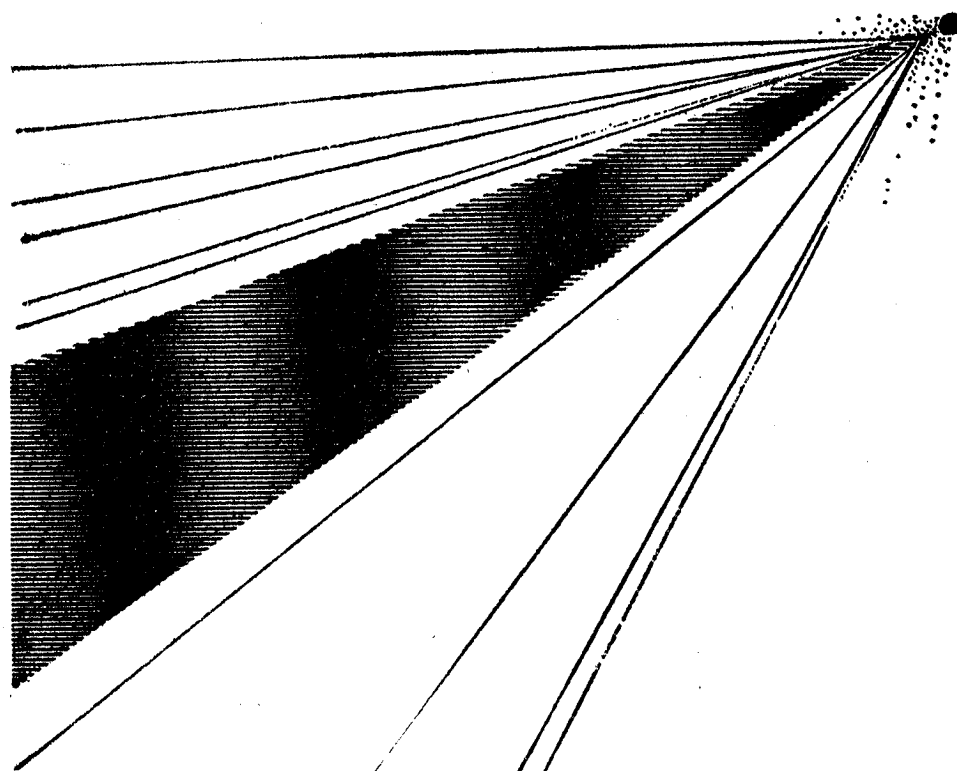
Wanting something for nothing has been man's dream, since he first saw the advantages of being intolerably greedy. It has been dreams such as these that have made man what he is. Flaw-wise, man is tops.

THE

CRIME



A NOVELETTE
BY... Jack Ritchie



MACHINE

I WAS PRESENT the last time you committed murder," Henry said.

I lit my cigar. "Really?"

"Of course you couldn't see me."

I smiled. "You were in your time machine?"

Henry nodded.

Naturally I didn't believe a word of it. About the time machine. He *could* actually have been present however, but not in that fantastic manner.

Murder is my business and the fact that there had been a witness when I disposed of James Brady was naturally disconcerting. And now, for the sake of security, I would have to devise some means of getting rid of Henry. I had no intention of being blackmailed by him. Not for any length of time, at least.

"I must warn you that I have taken pains to let people know that I have come here, Mr. Reeves," Henry said. "They do not know why I am here, but they do know that I am here. You understand, don't you?"

I smiled again. "I do not murder people in my own apartment. It is the height of inhospitality. And so there will be no necessity for you to switch our drinks. I assure you your glass contains nothing stronger than brandy."

The situation was basically unpleasant, but nevertheless I found myself rather enjoying Henry's bizarre story. "This machine of yours, Henry, is it a bit like a barber's chair?"

"To some degree," he admitted.

Evidently we had both seen the same motion picture. "With a round reflector-like device behind you? And levers in front which you pull to propel you into the past? Or the future?"

"Just the past. I'm still working

on the mechanism for the future." Henry sipped his brandy. "My machine is also mobile. That is, it not only projects me into the past, but also to any point on the earth I desire."

Excellent, I thought. Quite an improvement over the old model time machines. "And you are invisible?"

"Correct. I cannot participate in any manner in the past. I can only observe."

This madman did at least think with some degree of logic. To so much as injure the wing of a butterfly ten thousand years ago could conceivably re-shuffle the course of history.

Henry had come to my apartment at three in the afternoon. He had not given me his last name, which was entirely natural since he intended to blackmail me. He was fairly tall and thin, with glasses that gave him an owlish appearance and hair that tended toward anarchy.

He leaned forward. "I read in yesterday's newspaper that a James Brady was shot to death in a warehouse on Blenheim Street at approximately eleven in the evening of July the twenty-seventh."

I thought I could supply the rest. "And so you hopped into your time machine, set the dials back to July the twenty-seventh and to

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Blenheim Street and were there at ten-thirty for a ringside seat, waiting for me to re-commit the crime?"

"Precisely."

I would have to discuss this particular form of insanity with Dr. Powers. He is a quite mature and—since I disposed of his wife—wealthy psychiatrist.

Henry smiled thinly. "You shot James Brady at exactly ten-fifty-one. As you stooped over him to make certain that he was dead, you dropped your car keys. You said, 'Oh, damn!' and picked them up. At the door of the warehouse, you looked back and lifted your hand in a mock salute to the corpse. Then you departed."

Unquestionably he had been there. Not in that fabulous time machine, but probably hiding among the thousands of boxes and bales inside the warehouse—an accidental witness to the murder. It was one of those unfortunate coincidences that occur occasionally to mar an otherwise perfect killing. But why did he bother to resort to this fantastic story?

Henry put down his glass. "I think that five thousand dollars would be sufficient for me to forget what I saw."

For how long, I wondered. A month? Two? I took a puff of my cigar. "If you went to the police,

it would be your word against mine."

"Could you bear an investigation?"

I really didn't know. I am a very careful practitioner of my craft, but it was still possible that here and there I might have made some slight revealing error. I certainly would not welcome the interest of the authorities. Of that much I was positive.

I replenished my glass. "You seem to have fallen into an interesting and profitable business. Have you approached many other murderers?" I looked at his suit. It had undoubtedly been sold with two pairs of trousers.

Perhaps he read my mind. "I have just started, Mr. Reeves. You are the first murderer I have approached."

He smiled primly. "I have done considerable other research on you, Mr. Reeves. On June the 10th, at eleven-twelve in the evening, an automobile which you had stolen for the purpose ran down a Mrs. Irvin Perry."

He could have read about Mrs. Perry's death in the newspapers. But how did he know that I had been the driver? A wild guess?

"You parked approximately one hundred yards from the intersection. You kept your motor running while you waited for Mrs.

Perry to make her appearance. Ten minutes before she arrived, a collie ran across the street. Seven minutes before she arrived, a fire engine sped past. Three minutes before she arrived, a model A Ford filled with teenagers raced by. The automobile's muffler was faulty. It was quite noisy."

I frowned. How could he possibly have known those things?

Henry was enjoying himself. "On September 28th, last April, at two-fifteen of a chilly afternoon, a Gerald Mitchell 'fell' off an escarpment near his home while he was taking a stroll. You had a bit of trouble with him. Though he was a small man, he showed remarkable strength. He managed to tear the left pocket of your coat before you could throw him into space."

I caught myself staring at him and quickly took a sip of brandy.

"Five thousand dollars," Henry said. "Small bills, of course. Nothing larger than a five hundred. Naturally I didn't expect you to have that much cash lying about. I shall return tomorrow evening at eight."

I pulled myself together. For a moment I had almost entertained the thought that Henry actually might have a time machine. But there was some other explanation and I would have to think it out.

At the door to the hallway, I

smiled. "Henry, would you hop into your time machine and find out who Jack the Ripper really was? I'm frightfully curious."

Henry nodded. "I'll do that tonight."

I closed the door and went into my living room.

My wife Diana put aside her fashion magazine. "Who was that strange creature?"

"He claims to be an inventor."

"Really? He certainly looks mad enough for the part. I imagine he wanted to sell you an invention?"

"Not exactly."

Diana is green-eyed and cool and she is perhaps no more predatory or unfaithful than any other woman who marries a man with money who is thirty years her senior. I am fully aware of the nature of our relationship, but I realize that one must pay by various means for the enjoyment of a work of art. And Diana is a work of art—a triumph of physical nature. I value her quite as highly as I do my Modiglianis and my Van Goghs.

"What is he supposed to have invented?"

"A time machine."

She smiled. "I am partial to perpetual motion machines."

I was faintly irritated. "Perhaps it works."

She studied me. "I hope you have no intention of letting that

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queer man talk you out of money."

"No, my dear. I still retain my mental faculties."

Her solicitude for my money would have been touching, except that I realized that she preferred to spend it on herself. Henry's chances of acquiring any of it were nil as far as she was concerned.

She picked up the magazine. "Has he asked you to see it?"

"No. And even if he does, I have no intention of doing so."

And yet I wondered how Henry could possibly have managed to know the details of those three murders. His presence at one of them could be an acceptable coincidence. But three?

There was no such a thing as a time machine. There had to be some other explanation—something that an intelligent man could believe.

I glanced at my watch and turned my mind to another matter. "I have something to attend to, Diana. I'll be back in an hour or two."

I drove to the main post office downtown and opened my box with a key. The letter I had been expecting was inside.

I conduct most of my business by mail and box number. My clients do not know my name, even on those occasions when personal contact is necessary.

The letter was from Jason Spender. We had exchanged some correspondence and Spender had been negotiating for the elimination of a Charles Atwood. Spender did not give his reasons for that desire and for my purposes they were not necessary. In this case, however, I could hazard a guess. Spender and Atwood were partners in a building concern and evidently sharing the profits no longer appealed to Spender.

The letter accepted my terms—fifteen thousand dollars—and provided the information that Atwood had a dinner engagement tomorrow evening and would return to his home at approximately eleven. Spender would have an alibi for that particular time in the event that the police might make embarrassing inquiries.

I drove on to the Shippler Detective Agency and went directly to Andrew Shippler.

I cannot, of course, employ his agency continuously to follow my wife. But several times a year I made a precautionary use of his services for a week or two. It is usually sufficient.

In 1958, for instance, Shippler discovered a Terence Reilly. He was extremely personable—fair, athletic, and the type to which Diana seems to be drawn—and I cannot blame Diana too much.

However Terence Reilly soon departed this world. I was not paid for the demise. It was a labor of love.

Shippler was a plump man in his fifties with the air of an accountant. He took a typewritten page from a folder and adjusted his rimless glasses. "Your wife left your apartment twice yesterday. In the morning at ten-thirty she went to a small hat shop for an hour. She finally purchased a blue and white hat with. . . ."

"Never mind the details."

He was slightly aggrieved. "But details can be important, Mr. Reeves. We try to be absolutely thorough." He glanced at the page again. "Then she had a strawberry soda at a drugstore and went on to. . . ."

I interrupted again. "Did she see anyone? Talk to anyone?"

"Well, the owner of the hat shop and the clerk at the drugstore counter."

"Besides that," I snapped.

He shook his head. "No. But she left the apartment again at two-thirty in the afternoon. She went to a small cocktail bar on Farwell. There she met two women her age, apparently by prearrangement. It appears that they had been college classmates and hadn't seen each other for years. My man overheard most of their conversation.

They discussed their former classmates and what they were doing now." Shippler cleared his throat. "It seems that they were most impressed that your wife had . . . ah . . . caught such a man of means."

"What did Diana say?"

"She was extremely noncommittal." Shippler folded his hands. "Your wife consumed one Pink Lady and one Manhattan during the course of two hours."

"I am not interested in my wife's liquor preferences. Did she see anyone else? A man?"

Shippler shook his head. "No. At four-ten she left the two women and returned to your apartment."

The human mind is a peculiar thing. I was relieved, of course—and yet, a trifle disappointed.

"Shall we keep watching her?" Shippler asked hopefully.

This time I had had Diana under surveillance for about a week. I mulled over Shippler's question. Shippler charged one hundred dollars a day and that was rather expensive. I smiled slightly. Now if I had Henry's time machine, I could save a great deal of money. "Watch her a few days more," I said. "And I have something else for you."

"Yes?"

"At eight tomorrow evening, I am expecting a caller. He will be with me ten to twenty minutes.

When he leaves, I want him followed. I want to know who he is and where he lives." I gave Shippler a description of Henry. "Phone me as soon as you find out."

I went to the bank and withdrew five thousand dollars.

At seven the next evening Diana left to see a motion picture. Or at least so she informed me. I would find out about that later.

Henry arrived punctually at eight o'clock and I took him into my study.

He took a chair. "He was a clerk with an importing concern."

"Who was?" I asked.

"Jack the Ripper. A timid-looking man—in his early forties, I'd estimate. He was apparently a bachelor and he lived with his mother."

I smiled. "How interesting. What was his name?"

"I haven't gotten that yet. You see people don't go about with signs hanging from their necks and it can be difficult to find out who they actually are."

He could easily have invented some name for this Jack the Ripper, but this was really more clever—and logical.

Henry said, "Do you have the five thousand dollars?"

"Yes." I got the package and handed it to him.

He rose. "Tonight I think I'll

go back to Custer's Massacre. I find history fascinating."

I had only one consolation. When the time came to kill him, I would enjoy every moment of it.

When he was gone, I sat beside the phone and waited impatiently. At nine-thirty it rang and I quickly lifted the receiver.

"This is Shippler."

"Well, where does he live?"

Shippler's voice was apologetic. "I'm afraid my man lost him."

"What?"

"He transferred from bus to bus and finally disappeared. I think he suspected he was being followed."

"You blundering idiot!" I roared.

"Really, Mr. Reeves," Shippler said stiffly. "It is my man who is the blundering idiot."

I hung up and poured myself some bourbon. This time Henry had eluded me, but there would be other times. He would be back. Blackmailers are never satisfied.

I became aware of the time and realized that I still had work to do that night. I got into my coat and hat and went downstairs to the apartment garage.

Charles Atwood's home was a large one embedded in several acres of wooded property. It was a situation I fancied, since it offered the maximum of concealment.

The dwelling was dark, except

for lights on the third floor where I imagined the servants were quartered.

Atwood's three car garage was detached from the house. I took a stand behind a clump of trees near it and waited.

At eleven-fifteen a car swung into the driveway and made its way to the garage. It stopped momentarily while the automatic doors rose, and then it disappeared into the garage.

Thirty seconds later, a side door opened and a tall man stepped into the moonlight. He began walking toward the house.

I had my revolver and silencer ready and I waited until he came within fifteen feet of me before I left my concealment.

Atwood stopped with an exclamation of startled surprise as he saw me.

I pulled the trigger and Atwood dropped to the ground without a sound. I made certain that he was dead—I do not like to leave things half done—and then made my way back through the woods and to the street where I had parked my car.

The assignment had been entirely successful and, for the first time in thirty-six hours, I felt a certain peace with the world.

I returned to my apartment a little before midnight and I was

relaxing when the phone shrilled.

It was Henry. "I see that you killed someone else tonight," he announced pleasantly.

My hands were moist.

"When I arrived home," Henry said, "I got into my time machine and turned it back to the time when I left your apartment. I wanted to see if you had attempted to follow me. I have to be cautious, you know. After all, I am dealing with a murderer."

I said nothing.

"You didn't follow me, but you did leave your apartment and I followed in my machine as a matter of curiosity."

That infernal time machine! Was it possible?

"I'm just wondering," Henry said. "Was that the man you were supposed to kill—the one you killed?"

What was he getting at?

"Because there were two men in the car," Henry said.

I spoke involuntarily. "Two?"

"Yes. You shot the first man as he came out of the garage. The second man left it about forty-five seconds later."

I closed my eyes. "Did he see me?"

"No. You were gone by that time. He just bent over the man you'd shot and called, 'Fred! Fred!'"

I was definitely perspiring. "Henry, I'd like to see you."

"Why?"

"I can't discuss it over the phone. But I've got to see you."

His voice was dubious. "I don't know."

"It means money. A lot of money."

He thought it over. "All right," he said finally. "Tomorrow? Around eight?"

I couldn't wait that long. "No. Right now. As soon as you can get here."

Henry required more seconds to think. "No tricks now, Mr. Reeves," he said. "I'll be prepared for anything."

"No tricks, Henry. I swear it. Get here as soon as you can."

He arrived forty-five minutes later. "What is it, Mr. Reeves?"

I had been drinking—not to excess, but I simply found that accepting such an idea—and I was on the verge of accepting it—was painful to my intelligence. "Henry, I'd like to buy your machine. If it really works."

"It works." He shook his head. "But I won't sell it."

"One hundred thousand dollars, Henry."

"Out of the question."

"A hundred and fifty thousand."

"It's my invention," Henry said

peevishly. "I wouldn't dream of parting with it."

"You could make another, couldn't you?"

"Well . . . yes." He eyed me suspiciously.

"Henry, do you expect me to mass produce time machines once I get yours? To sell them to others?"

His face indicated that evidently he did.

"Henry," I said patiently. "Having anyone else in the world get hold of that machine is the last thing I want. After all, I *am* a murderer. I wouldn't welcome other people delving into the past, especially my past—now would I?"

"No," he admitted. "Somebody else might want to turn you over to the police. There are people like that."

"Two hundred thousand dollars, Henry," I said. "My last offer." Actually money was no object to me now. With Henry's machine—if it worked—I could make millions.

A crafty light crept into his eyes. "Two hundred and fifty thousand. Take it or leave it."

"Henry, you drive a hard bargain. But I'll meet your price. However I've got to be satisfied that the machine works. When can I see it?"

"I'll get in touch with you," he said cagily. "Tomorrow, the next day, maybe in a week."

"Why not right now?"

He shook his head. "No. You're very clever, Mr. Reeves. Perhaps you've devised a trap for this moment. I prefer to set the time and terms myself."

I was unable to shake him out of his determination and he left five minutes later.

I rose at seven in the morning and went downstairs to purchase a newspaper. I had indeed killed the wrong man. A Fred Turley. I had never even heard of him before.

Atwood and Turley had returned from the dinner and an evening of cards together and driven into the garage. Turley had gone out of the side door, but Atwood remained behind to lock his car. Then he had seen his briefcase still on the rear seat. After he had recovered it, re-locked the car, and left the garage, he had found Turley dead on the path leading to the house. At first he had thought Turley had suffered a stroke of some kind. When he finally discovered the truth, he had raised an alarm. The police had no clues either to the identity of the murderer or the motive for the killing.

I found myself fretting about the apartment all morning waiting for

Henry to phone me. I skimmed through the paper a half a dozen times before an item in the local section caught my eye.

It seemed that once again some fool had bought a "money machine."

This form of swindle was probably as old as currency itself. The victim was approached by a stranger claiming to have a money machine. One simply inserted a dollar, turned the handle, and a twenty dollar bill emerged from the opposite end. In this case, the victim had purchased the machine for five hundred dollars—the stranger claiming that he was forced to sell because he needed cash.

People are incredible idiots!

Couldn't the victim have the basic intelligence and imagination to realize that if the machine were actually genuine, all that the stranger had to do to get five hundred dollars himself was to turn the handle twenty-five times and transform twenty-five dollars into five hundred?

Yes, people are monumental . . .

I found myself reading the article again. Then I went to the liquor cabinet.

After two bourbons, I allowed myself to bask in the returning sun of sanity.

I had almost fallen into Henry's

trap. I had, I reluctantly admitted, been just a bit stupid.

I smiled. Still . . . it might be a rather amusing adventure to see Henry's time machine—to see in what manner he hoped to convince me that it actually worked.

Henry came to my apartment at one o'clock in the afternoon. He appeared shaken. "Horrible," he muttered. "Horrible."

"What's horrible?"

"Custer's massacre." He wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. "I'll have to avoid things like that in the future."

I almost laughed. Rather a neat touch. Henry knew how to act. "And now we see your machine?"

Henry nodded. "I suppose so. We'll take your car. Mine's in the garage for repairs."

I had driven him about a mile, when he told me to pull over to the curb. I glanced about. "Is this where you live?"

"No. But from here on I drive your car. You will be blindfolded and you will lie on the back seat."

"Oh, come now, Henry!"

"It's absolutely necessary if you want me to take you to the machine," Henry said stubbornly. "And I've got to search you to see that you aren't carrying a weapon."

I was not carrying a weapon

and Henry's idea of a blindfold consisted of a black hood that fitted over my entire head and was fastened by strings at the back of the neck.

I'll be keeping an eye on you through the rear view mirror," Henry cautioned. "If I see you touch that blindfold the whole thing is off."

Automatically I found myself trying to remember the turns Henry made as he drove and attempting to identify sounds which might tell me where he was taking me. However, the task proved too complicated and I finally relaxed as much as I could and waited for the drive to end.

After an hour, the car finally slowed to a stop. Henry left the wheel and I heard what I believed to be the sound of garage doors being opened. Henry returned to the car; we moved forward fifteen feet or so, and stopped again.

The doors were closed and I heard a light switch flicked on.

"We're here," Henry said. "I'll take off that blindfold now."

As I had surmised, we were in a garage—but plywood sheets had been nailed over all the windows and a single electric light burned overhead. A stout oak door was in the cement building-block wall to the left.

Henry produced a revolver.

A horrendous thought gripped me. What a fool I had been! I had blindly—literally and figuratively—allowed myself to be lured here. And now, for reasons unknown to me, Henry was about to kill me!

"Henry," I began, "I'm sure we can talk this over and come to some . . ."

He waved the gun. "This is just a precaution. In case you have any ideas."

I was too uneasy to have any ideas.

Henry produced a key and went to the oak door. "This used to be a two-car garage, but I divided it in half. The time machine is in here." He unlocked the door and switched on an overhead light.

Henry's time machine was just about as I had anticipated—a metallic chair with some scant leather upholstery, a large mirror-bright aluminum shield or reflector behind it, and a series of levers, dials, and buttons on a control board attached to the platform on which the chair stood.

The room was windowless and all four walls—with the exception of three grated ventilators approximately shoulder high—were solid cement block. The floor was concrete and the ceiling was plastered.

I smiled. "Henry, your machine looks almost like an electric chair."

"Yes," he said musingly, "it does look rather like that, doesn't it?"

I stared at him. Could he have been so insidious as to actually . . . I studied the machine again. "Naturally I want a demonstration. How does it work?"

"Get into the chair and I'll show you which levers to pull."

The device *did* look a great deal like an electric chair. I cleared my throat. "I have a better idea, Henry. Suppose *you* take a trip in the chair. I'll just wait right here until you return."

Henry gave it thought. "All right. But you'll have to leave the room."

Ah ha, I thought.

"You see when I start the machine," Henry said, "it creates quite a disturbance around me. That's why I had to make this room so solid. I've installed ventilators to take care of some of the turbulence, but I'm not too sure how well they work. I have no idea what might happen to you if you remained."

I smiled. "I might possibly be injured? Or killed?"

"Exactly. So if you'll leave and close the door I'll get on with it. And another precaution. When I return, you've got to be out of the room, too."

I chuckled to myself as I left and closed the door behind me.

I lit a cigar and waited, amused.

What happened next was most impressive. First there was a low whine, as though a generator were starting. It rose gradually in pitch and then came a rumbling sound mixed with the undulating keen of a fierce wind. It increased in volume and lasted for approximately a minute.

Then it stopped abruptly and there was absolute silence.

Yes, I thought. Altogether a good show. But then it would have to be if Henry expected to extract two hundred and fifty thousand dollars from me.

I went to the door and opened it.

The room was empty!

I stood there gaping. It couldn't be! The only way out of the room was the door I had just entered and even that was certainly too small to pull the chair through. And the only other openings were the three grated ventilators and they were less than two feet square!

The whining suddenly rose again. Strong air currents swirled around the room and I found myself gasping as I fled the room and slammed the door behind me.

The noise became deafening and then, just as abruptly as before, it stopped.

The door clicked open and

Henry stepped out of the room. Behind him I could see the time machine back in its place.

Henry appeared thoughtful. Finally he shook his head. "Cleopatra wasn't even good-looking."

My heart was still pounding. "You were gone only a minute or two."

He waved a hand. "In one time sense. Actually I spent an hour on her barge." He came back to the present. "You can raise two hundred and fifty thousand dollars?"

I nodded weakly. "It will take a week or two." I wiped my forehead. "Henry, I've got to take a trip on that chair."

Henry frowned. "I've been thinking that over, Mr. Reeves. No. You could steal my invention."

"But how? Wouldn't I have to come back here?"

"No. You could go into the past and then return to any place in the world. Perhaps a thousand miles from here."

He pulled a small wrench from his pocket and began disconnecting a section of the control panel.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm taking out some key transistors. I think I'll keep them on my person. That way if someone should steal my time machine he would find it useless."

Henry drove me back to my apartment, taking the same precautions as before, and then he left me.

In America we seem to have a feeling of guilt about discarding old license plates and Henry had been no exception. There had been four old sets of them nailed to the garage wall and I had memorized two of them.

I got Shippler on the phone. "Can you trace license numbers?"

"Yes, Mr. Reeves. I have connections at the state capitol."

I gave him the numbers. "The first is a 1958 license number and the second is 1959. I want the name and address of the owner as soon as possible. Phone me the moment you get the information."

I was about to hang up.

"Oh, Mr. Reeves. We have the report on your wife for yesterday. Would you like me to give it over the phone?"

I had forgotten about that. "Well?"

"She left the apartment yesterday morning at ten-thirty. She bought some orange sticks and nail polish at the drugstore."

"What shade of nail polish?" I asked dryly.

"Summer Rose," he said proudly. "Then she went to—"

"Never mind all that. Did she meet anyone?"

"No, sir. Just the drugstore

clerk. A woman. But in the evening she again left your apartment at three minutes after seven. She met a woman named Doris. My man overheard Doris say that she has twins."

I sighed.

"They went to a show and left at eleven-thirty."

I was not going to ask him the name of the picture. "Is that all?"

"Yes, sir. She returned to your apartment at eleven-fifty-six. The name of the picture . . ."

I hung up and made myself a whiskey and soda.

The idea of a time machine was fantastic. But was it really? We are all aware that there is a fourth dimension. And future travelers in space will eventually have to use space warp in order to reach planets that are physically inaccessible in the present time sense.

Diana came into the room with a manicure kit. "You look thoughtful."

"I have a lot to think about."

"Does it have anything to do with that man who was here? The inventor?"

I sipped my whiskey. "Suppose I told you that his time machine works?"

She began working on her nails. "I hope you haven't been taken in?"

I noticed that one of the bottles

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beside her was named Summer Rose. "And why should a time machine be impossible?"

"Don't tell me he's convinced you?"

I felt a bit defensive. "Perhaps."

She smiled. "Has he asked you for money?"

I watched her use nail polish remover. "How much do you think a time machine would be worth?"

She raised an eyebrow.

I held up a hand. "Let us just *suppose* that there is such a thing? How much would *you* be willing to pay for it?"

She examined her nails. "Perhaps a thousand or two. It might be an amusing toy."

"A *toy*?" I laughed. "My dear, don't you realize the tremendous import of such a thing? You could go into the past and ferret out any secret at all."

She glanced up. "Perhaps try simple blackmail?"

"My dear Diana, not *simple* blackmail, but blackmail extended, doubled, quadrupled. No nation's secrets would be safe from discovery. You could sell your services to the government . . . any government . . . for millions. You could be present at the most important council chambers, the most isolated laboratories . . ."

She looked up again. "Is that what you'd do if you had such a

machine, use it for blackmail?"

I had let myself get carried away. I smiled. "Just indulging in fantasy, dear."

Her eyes seemed to calculate me. "Don't do anything foolish."

"My dear, I am the most cautious man in the world."

I decided that I would not hear from Shippler within the next half an hour and so I went to the post office.

I had a letter from Spender. He expressed keen disappointment that I had killed Turley instead of Atwood. He had played golf with Turley a number of times and would miss him. He also suggested that I return the fifteen thousand dollars or complete my assignment.

Shippler phoned at three-thirty.

"Both of the license numbers belong to the same person," he said. "A Henry Pruitt. He lives at 2349 West Headley. This city."

I waited until ten that evening and then got my flashlight, a tape measure, and my ring of special keys from the wall safe and went down to my car.

Henry's house was in a sparsely populated section of the city—there were empty lots on either side of his home. It was a two story building, but still relatively small. A garage stood next to the alley.

I parked my car a hundred feet down the street and lit a cigar. At eleven the lights in the living room went out and a few moments later they reappeared in what was evidently an upstairs bedroom.

After ten minutes, they too went out.

I waited another half an hour and then made my way through the littered lots to the garage. It had originally been a common two-car structure, but now the left-hand doors had been replaced by a solid cement block wall. I couldn't peer into the right-hand unit, because, as I'd noticed before, the windows had been covered by plywood. Henry clearly believed in absolute secrecy for his invention.

I measured the outside of the garage, the height, width, and length. Then I took the rings of keys out of my pocket and, after a few tries, succeeded in opening the door. I stepped inside, closed the door behind me, and turned on my flashlight.

Yes, this was the place I had been in earlier in the day—the four pairs of license plates nailed to the wall, the workbench at the far end, and the door leading to the time machine on the left.

I switched on the overhead light.

The door to the next room was also locked, but it presented no problem to me. I turned on the

light, somewhat apprehensively.

Yes, there it was. The time machine!

For a moment, the idea of stealing it crossed my mind. But then I remembered that Henry had a section of the controls. And besides, how would I get it out of the room? The doorway was obviously too small.

For that matter, how had Henry gotten the machine *into* the room?

I pondered on that and decided he must have brought it in piecemeal and then assembled it.

What really concerned me was how he had managed, earlier in the day, to get the time machine *out* of the room.

That was what I was there to find out.

I began by examining the walls. They were cement block on all four sides and absolutely solid. I took measurements of the room and the entire inside of the garage. My computations showed that there were no secret compartments, no false chambers. I examined the ventilator grates thoroughly. I tried to shake them loose, but they were securely screwed into place. They could not be removed without some time and effort. I examined the floor. It was compact and unbroken cement.

There was one more possibility. The ceiling. Perhaps Henry had

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some device—some series of hoists—that would whisk the machine into a ceiling crevice.

I got a step ladder from the other room and went over the ceiling with minute thoroughness. The plaster was old and a bit grimy, but there was not even one crack that might indicate access to some secret compartment above.

I got off the ladder and found myself trembling.

There was no possible way out of this room. None at all.

Except by the time machine!

It was ten minutes before the weakness left me. I turned out the lights and locked both doors behind me.

The next morning I began converting my capital into cash.

Shippler called in the afternoon with his daily report. "Mrs. Reeves attended a card party at the home of this Doris at two yesterday afternoon. I found out her last name. It's Weaver. The names of the twins are . . ."

"Confound it, I don't care what the names of the blasted twins are."

"Sorry. Your wife left there at four-thirty-six. She stopped at a supermarket and bought four lamb chops, two pounds of . . ."

"She went shopping for the cook," I stormed. "Now do you have anything *important*?"

"Nothing really important, I guess."

"Then send me your bill. I won't be needing you any more."

"Well, if you do," Shippler said brightly, "you know where we are. And congratulations."

"Congratulations? On what?"

"Well . . . on your wife's . . . ah . . . faithfulness . . . this time."

I hung up.

No. I wouldn't be needing Shippler any more. If I wanted to find out anything at all about Diana, I would soon be able to do so myself.

My thoughts went to Henry. He could undoubtedly build another time machine, but I couldn't allow that. In order for my plans to be effective I had to have a monopoly. Henry would have to go and I would see to that after I possessed the machine.

At the end of the week, I had the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash. I was tempted to phone Henry, but I was afraid he might shy away entirely if he knew that I had discovered his identity.

Three excruciatingly long days more went by before Henry rang the door of my apartment.

I drew him quickly inside. "I have the money. All of it."

Henry rubbed an ear. "I really don't know whether I should sell the machine."

I glared at him. "Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. It's all the money I have in the world. I won't pay another cent."

"It isn't the money. I just don't know if I ought to go through with it."

I opened the suitcase. "Look at it, Henry. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Do you know what that much money can buy? You can make yourself dozens of time machines. You can gold-plate them. You can set jewels in them."

He still held back.

"Henry," I said severely. "We made a bargain, didn't we? You can't go back on that."

Henry finally sighed. "I suppose not. But I still think I'm making a mistake."

I rubbed my hands. "Now let's get down to my car. You may blindfold me and drive me to your place."

"Blindfolding won't be necessary now," Henry said morosely. "As long as you're getting the time machine you'll be able to find out who I am and where I live anyway."

How true. Henry was doomed.

"But I will search you," Henry said.

The ride to Henry's garage seemed interminable, but at last we were inside. Henry fumbled with the keys to the next room and I al-

most yielded to the urge to snatch them from him and do the job myself.

Finally he had the door open and switched on the overhead light.

The machine was there. Beautiful. Shining. And now it was mine.

Henry took the vital control unit out of his pocket and threaded it into place. He took a sheet of paper from his breast pocket. "These are the directions. Don't lose this paper or you might become stranded somewhere in time. Better yet, memorize them."

I took the sheet out of his hands.

"You may not get the exact date you want at the first try," Henry said. "Because calendars have been changed and besides, once you get back more than five hundred years, you'll find all sorts of errors in history. But you can approximate the time and then use this fine tuner over here in order to pinpoint . . ."

"Stop your babbling and get out of here!" I snapped. "I can read directions as well as anyone."

Henry was a bit miffed, but he left the room and closed the door.

I got into the chair and read the typewritten directions. They were absurdly simple. But I read them again and then put the paper in my pocket.

Now, where would I go?

I studied the controls.

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Yes. I had it. The New Year's Eve party at the Lowells. Diana had disappeared at ten-thirty and I hadn't seen her again until two A.M. of 1960. She had never given me a satisfactory explanation for her absence.

I adjusted the time control and the direction knob. I did not know the exact distance to the Lowells from this point, but I would use the fine tuner directly under the mileage dial once I got underway.

I hesitated a moment, took a deep breath, and then pressed the red button.

I waited.

Nothing happened.

I frowned and pressed the button again.

Nothing.

I took the slip out of my pocket and feverishly reviewed the directions. I had committed no errors.

And then I knew! The entire thing had been a hoax!

I leaped out of the chair and rushed to the door.

It was locked.

I pounded with my fists and called Henry's name. I cursed and shrieked until my voice was hoarse.

The door remained closed.

I managed to get some control over myself and darted to the time machine. I wrenched loose a section of the chair piping and returned to the door.

The piece of pipe was aluminum and fiendishly light and malleable. It took me more than forty-five minutes before I managed to force the pins out of the door hinges and get out of the room.

I found an envelope under the windshield wiper of my car and tore it open.

The typewritten pages were, of course, intended for me.

My dear Mr. Reeves:

Yes, you have been thoroughly hoaxed. There is no such a thing as a time machine.

I suppose I could leave it at that and allow you to go mad attempting to arrive at some reasonable explanation, but I shall not. I am quite proud of my little project and would like the attention of a truly appreciative audience.

I think you will do nicely.

How did I manage to know those interesting details of your last four murders?

I was there.

Not in the time machine, of course.

You are undoubtedly aware that it was not your urbanity, your charm, which attracted Diana to your hearth. She married you for your money—of which you gave indications of having a lot.

But you were extremely reti-

cent about the extent and source of your wealth—an evasion which unquestionably can drive a woman to desperate curiosity. Especially a woman like Diana.

She had you followed and for the purpose employed a detective agency. Shippler, I believe the name was. They are quite thorough and I recommend them highly.

It was indeed fortunate for you—and certainly now for Diana and me—that you did not choose that particular time to commit one of your murders. But it was during one of your periods of unemployment and you were not followed for long. A week.

The reports concerning your activities were mundane, but Diana did fasten on one particular repeated detail they contained. And details are so important.

Every day you went to a rented box at the main post office.

Now why would you want a private box? Diana wondered. After all, you do have a home address and that should be sufficient for ordinary mail. Ordinary mail. That was it. This wasn't for ordinary mail.

It was child's play for Diana to get an impression of your box key while you slept and to have

a duplicate made, for her use.

She made it a practice to go to your post office box each morning—you go there in the afternoon. Whenever she found a letter, she removed it, steamed it open, read the contents, and returned it to the box in plenty of time for you to pick it up the same day.

And so you see it was possible for her to know the details of your negotiations to murder, when the murders were scheduled to be committed and the places where they were to occur. And *that* made it possible for me to be there early, conceal myself, and *watch* you work.

Yes, we've known each other for some time—meeting discreetly—very discreetly. Diana remembers a Terence Reilly and his sudden disappearance. And as an added precaution—since we were on the verge of acquiring a quarter of a million dollars and wanted nothing to prevent that—we have not seen each other for almost a month.

Our original plan had been only blackmail. But again the question of danger arose. How long could I blackmail you and get away with it?

And so we determined to strike once and get *all* of your money.

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At the moment you are reading this, Diana and I are increasing the distance between you and us. The world is a large place, Mr. Reeves, and I do not think you will find us. Not without a time machine.

And how did I manage that time machine?

It was an elaborate hoax, Mr. Reeves, but with two hundred and fifty thousand dollars at stake, one can afford to be elaborate.

When you left me alone with my time machine ten days ago, Mr. Reeves, I turned on two devices concealed above the room. One created noise and the other created wind.

And then I quickly *folded* the time machine.

You have no doubt by now noticed that it is extremely light. And if you will look again, you will discover that there are a number of concealed hinges which allow one to fold it into a compact shape.

Then I removed the grate of one of the "ventilators," pushed the collapsed machine through into the small cubicle behind the wall, followed into the cubicle myself, and pulled the grating back into place behind me.

I watched as you re-entered the room, Mr. Reeves, and I al-

lowed you only thirty seconds of astonishment before I turned on the noise and wind machines again. I did not want you to collect your wits and examine the room.

When you left, I simply crawled out of my hiding place and unfolded my machine.

I think that was rather ingenious, don't you?

But you say that is impossible? There *is* no hiding place for the time machine—even folded—and for me?

The room is absolutely solid? You have examined it yourself and you would stake your life on it?

You are right, Mr. Reeves. There is no hiding place here. The room *is* solid.

But you see, Mr. Reeves, there are *two* garages.

The first one, to which I took you blindfolded, is in reality located several miles from here. It is the same type of building—a standard brand erected by the thousands in this area—and I took great pains to make it an exact duplicate of the one you are in now—even to the position of the tools lying on the bench, the ladder against the wall.

The two garages are identical—with some exceptions. The time machine room in one of

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them is slightly smaller—to allow for the hiding place—and the noise and wind machines are installed under the eaves. As for the ventilators, with the exception of the one I used to enter my hiding place, they are actually blowers.

After I drove you back to your apartment, I returned, packed my time machine, took the license plates off the wall, and brought them here.

Those license plates?

You are a clever man, Mr. Reeves. I grant that and I have taken advantage of that cleverness. I nailed them to a conspicuous place on the wall with the express hope that you would utilize them to track me down—but to *this* place.

I wanted you to examine *this* garage. I wanted you to be ab-

solutely satisfied that the time machine had to be genuine. I was in a neighboring lot watching you after I had turned out the house lights.

I am, of course, not Henry Pruitt. The license plates belonged to the former tenant of the house.

Nevertheless, for the purposes of this letter, I remain, most gratefully,

Your servant,

Henry Pruitt.

I tore the letter to bits and snatched a peen hammer from the workbench.

As I smashed the time machine to smithereens, I couldn't help the horrible thought that perhaps someone, in a *real* time machine, might at that very moment be in the room watching me.

And laughing!



And now that you have finished reading Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, how did you like it? I should also be very interested to receive your reactions to the stories in it. Write to me c/o Suite 105, Lakeview Building, North Palm Beach, Florida.



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